



Introduction to Toolkits

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Pentecost 2024

When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together.

And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were.

There appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim...

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem.

At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language.

They were astounded.

--Acts of the Apostles 2:1-7a



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Introduction

This Pentecost, the pulse of the Holy Spirit guiding the Diocese of Des Moines quickens as we implement the mission and vision we believe God has bestowed on us. This pivotal moment comes after over three years of listening to one another, praying, identifying strategic priorities, and crafting concrete means of realizing our mission. Overall, we have humbly opened ourselves to what God's will asks of us. We are a people of faith who recognize there are many among us still searching for God in Central and Southwest Iowa. Our considerable investment of spiritual resources, human inspiration and practical wisdom is a labor of love for God and our neighbors. I personally believe with all my heart that God anoints this bold venture of faith and mutual accompaniment with his Holy Spirit—the same Spirit that came down upon those gathered together at the first Pentecost. I am pleased to share with you the fruits of this concerted listening, learning, mutual respect, and transparency in what follows: a bundled “basket” with an array of resources and a proposed means of engagement. This basket of the Spirit's fruits is served up to our parish leaders and persons of all ages living out their baptismal call to grow faith and deepen their connection with Jesus Christ and one another—including each of us, I hope!

A PENTECOST REFLECTION

Before I introduce you to the practical content—the six toolkits and other materials composing what is set before you here--I would like to offer a spiritual reflection that touches upon the process that led us to this signature initiative, and what we pray will unfold going forward.

As we attend to the Acts 2 passage above that details the Pentecost event, we can note how persons were in physical proximity to one another in a household. While we today heavily rely upon and appreciate how the devices we use extend the lines of communication and awareness, God's 'preferential option' is that we experience the richest form of interaction which is actual physical presence. This is true of the Son sent to us by the heavenly Father: Jesus took on a human body; he was nurtured and formed by Mary and Joseph in the human mode of listening and speaking, of praying, working, and loving one another.

Jesus claimed persons' attention in the synagogue; he climbed into the boat of his newfound disciples; he hung out in the houses of his friends and of those dismissed by the arrogant as sinners and tax collectors; he greatly desired to eat an ultimate meal, the Eucharist, with those who would be charged to bear the Gospel to all peoples. Jesus loves to be present to us, and loves when we are present to one another in genuine encounters where we offer our full attention to one another, for then his Spirit can inform and inspire us.

As St. Augustine comments, “Love itself, which binds us together in the bond of unity, would have no means of pouring soul into soul, and, as it were, mingling them with each other, if human beings never learned anything from one another.”

THE VISIONING PROCESS COMMENCES

We imitated Jesus' preferential priority for personal presence in our diocesan strategic visioning process moderated by Dan Ebener of St. Ambrose University. Dan, who holds a doctorate in business administration, is both a man of deep Catholic faith and practical experience in guiding groups of people in the secular and spiritual realms. He helps clarify mission and purpose and discern emerging priorities, and then translate them into tangible goals and objectives to pursue. He and his colleagues moderated over 35 listening sessions in our Diocese representing different regions, demographic groups, and attitudes about faith and the Church; he further conducted numerous one-on-one interviews, and by necessity also facilitated remote gatherings when logistics made it hard to come together.

Further, diocesan staff coordinated the completion of surveys eliciting people's hopes and fears, their appreciation and frustrations for how we live out our identity as Catholics—whether practicing or non-practicing. We also attempted to have conversations with some of the “nones”: persons who do not affiliate with any formal religion in our increasingly secular culture. All in all, over 3,500 people in our Diocese were engaged in this preliminary phase of visioning and planning! A remarkable dynamic unfolded that echoes what happened at Pentecost: while there was some turbulence, anxiety and confusion rooted in a lack of familiarity, there were also graced moments too numerous to count, where people not only mustered the confidence and courage to speak, but were enabled to truly listen and understand the perspective of former strangers become neighbors.

This dynamic is similar to what some of us have experienced while trying learn a foreign language or listen to someone with a dialect or accent that at first falls on deaf ears: we give ourselves over to the encounter; we cease to try and “figure out” and master the meaning of what is being communicated to us, and our frustration and fatigue yield to the “aha!” moment of understanding and empathy as the Spirit enables us to grasp what another intends to communicate. When any such moment occurs, it's an instance comparable to what twentieth-century writer and mystic Simone Weil describes as the essence of love of neighbor: the ability to attend and respond to one question: “What are you going through?”



A NOTE ABOUT 'SYNODALITY' ON BOTH LOCAL AND GLOBAL LEVELS

I interject some corollary comments: It is worth noting that while this whole endeavor has been unfolding in our local Church, the Diocese of Des Moines, a rather similar dynamic process has been taking place in the worldwide Catholic Church at the initiative of Pope Francis, prompted by the occasion of the Synod on Synodality. This phrase may strike us a rather vague, “churchy” term that is hard to define or grasp. Further, there has been much speculation and critical commentary in both church-related and popular media that might make us wary or suspicious of any sort of hidden agenda that would alter and diminish the integrity of our Catholic faith.

OUR STRATEGIC MISSION & VISION

“On that day, Jesus, went out of the house and sat down by the sea. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd stood along the shore. And he spoke to them at length in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep, and when the sun rose it was scorched, and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it. But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold. Whoever has ears to hear out to hear.”

MATTHEW 13:1-9

“Thus says the LORD: It shall come to pass I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even upon your male and female servants, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.”

JOEL 3:1-2

Following the extensive listening sessions and gathering of additional viewpoints and concerns, Dan Ebener worked closely with a group of primarily lay women and men from parishes around the Diocese, along with a few priests, deacons, and diocesan staff, who together composed the Strategic Visioning Steering Group. This group met together regularly over a period of 18 months. We prayed over the Scriptures and the data and discerned the emerging common priorities and hopes of our people. If I might speak for all the members of the group, we sensed the Holy Spirit illuminating and counseling us as we realized how united our people were in their heartfelt desires, in a way that transcends age-group, immigrant and native identities, rural and urban residences, economic and educational backgrounds.

At the same time, in my role as Bishop and shepherd of the Diocese, it fell to me to clarify and articulate the emerging vision that God is bestowing. I did not do so in a bubble or cave, but as a disciple of Jesus, a successor of the apostles, and a steward of the living Catholic Tradition. This Tradition continues to be represented today by the magisterium/teaching office of the Church, with Pope Francis as Supreme Pontiff and Vicar of Christ. I am also an Iowan who has lived most of my life in this state, with a profound reverence for both God's creation and the farmers and others who cultivate and make a life from the land.

Like Jesus himself, who often spoke in parables using images drawn from the ordinary experiences of people and nature, the harmony of Scripture and our own local diocesan culture—with the sense of the faithful, the signs of our own times, and a strong unifying ethos of agriculture—contribute well to our guiding mission and vision: ***“Sowing God’s Spirit: Cultivating Connections in Christ through Encounter, Friendship, and Communion.”***

I provide our mission and vision statements immediately below; please read and pray over these pieces in order to let the Spirit speak to you, inspire you, convert you, and confirm you own desire to accompany us on this pilgrimage of faith!

MISSION AND VISION STATEMENTS WITH REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

As you delve into the Mission and Vision Statements that follow, you might keep these reflection questions before you:

1. What words and images resonate with me, perhaps with my inner restlessness and unmet hopes?
2. Are there phrases that stir my longing for more meaningful relationships grounded in faith?
3. Do I sense the call to foster encounters with others in the name of Christ, opening hearts and minds to the invitation to live in communion with Jesus, the Father's Son, according to the inspiration and movements of the Holy Spirit.

MISSION STATEMENT: SOWING GOD'S SPIRIT

In the wake of his Resurrection, Jesus rouses us to become witnesses of true love who are moved as the Spirit wills to bear God's presence, healing compassion, and peace to a broken world. Sparked by the joy of the Gospel kindled in our own hearts, love turns fear to holy boldness as we listen and embody our Eucharistic Savior for persons who have grown lukewarm in their capacity to trust, and who find it hard to believe they are beautiful and beloved in God's sight. We bless and build up each other. We overcome forces of division by the Spirit's power to become one in Christ. Living by faith is the greatest adventure imaginable, for with God all things are possible. Sowing God's Spirit is our mission and a labor that never grows old, for we are fed by the daily bread of grace that God multiplies among us.

VISION STATEMENT: CULTIVATING CONNECTIONS IN CHRIST

As we Sow God's Spirit in the world, we lean into our vision of cultivating connections in Christ. The seeds of love that we sow yield fruit as we discover Jesus. We are grafted by grace in relationships with Jesus and with one another, like a vine and branches. We form intimate bonds with Christ through the personal and collective experiences of (1) *encounter*, (2) *friendship* and (3) *communion*. Cultivating these connections in Christ is central to our vision as a people after God's own heart.

ENCOUNTER

Those who cross paths with Jesus in the Bible - such as the shepherds and Magi at Bethlehem, Simeon and Anna, the woman at the well, Zacchaeus, the apostles, the bleeding woman who touches Jesus' garment, the centurion at Calvary, the disciples on the road to Emmaus - foreshadow how our lives are forever changed when we encounter the Son of the heavenly Father. His gaze and his touch convey the truth that God cares about us. He does not condemn but calls us to follow him to the fullness of life.

Once we open the door of our hearts to a personal connection with Christ, it can change the way we encounter people and are able to accompany them along the path of life. Poverty of spirit becomes an attractive, beatific feature rather than a disease against which we fortify ourselves. Like the Good Samaritan, we recognize someone bruised and victimized by a lack of love, and offer generous service as any true neighbor does. The Spirit transforms our senses and hearts to view others as bearers of God's image, worthy of dignity and respect amid the sorrows and joys, trials and tragedies, and celebrations that life affords all of us.

FRIENDSHIP

Jesus desires genuine friends who are ready to lay down their lives for one another just as he does for us. Christian love finds joy in doing the right thing, heedless of the cost. In his own experience, Jesus witnessed a school of marital friendship in the Nazareth home of Mary and Joseph. He experienced fraternal friendship with Martha, Mary and Lazarus, and he was known to be especially close to the apostles Peter, James, and John as they drew close to him and were converted before proclaiming the Gospel and performing miracles in his name.

Jesus is not simply the loving “giver” who pours out his body and blood, his very life for others. He shows us God’s humility in not being afraid to share his “need” for us. God’s truest friends, including saints such as St. Teresa of Calcutta, know that he still thirsts for souls to whom we are called to show love, to reveal that whatever we do for the hungry, naked, imprisoned, the vulnerable and least among us, we do for him. And in the process, these connections sown and sealed in the Spirit endure forever.

COMMUNION

We live in a time saturated by “networks” and social connections produced by technology. And yet, how many of us are still searching for a place to belong, to feel that we are unconditionally loved and accepted as we are? We do not need to digitally alter our image or our story. Jesus wants to incorporate our story into his story, which is more incredible than anything we could have imagined. God is revealed to be for all eternity a Trinity of persons perfect in love and relationship, united in being God and yet not a closed, gated community to which we cannot gain access. The Father sends his Son in the fullness of time so that we can participate in the communion of love who is God, thanks to Jesus becoming God-with-us, both human and divine in the wonder of the Incarnation. Jesus greatly desires to eat and drink with us as he did with disciples and the multitudes drawn around him. He then fulfills his desire to BECOME food and drink for us in the mysterious, miraculous gift of the Eucharist.

His sacramental presence in material stuff such as water, oil, bread and wine, and in persons who become the dwelling place of his Spirit, is the foundation of the community of persons called out of themselves to become sisters and brothers in Jesus’ name. This community has its own name: the Church. In forming the Church, Jesus never imposes himself on others but proposes a way, truth, and life by which we realize our own hearts’ desire. So, too, disciples of Jesus go out to echo the heavenly Father’s invitation to a wedding feast where all are welcome, especially the poor and those relegated to the “peripheries” of our society. In poetic language, we identify Jesus as the Bridegroom who is joined to his bride, the Church, expressing the connections formed by Jesus’ Risen Spirit, the loving friendships whose destination is heaven. There Mary shines radiantly among the multitude in God’s presence who sing his praises with all the angels in the communion of saints.

Here, I offer a concluding coda to our Vision Statement from Pope Francis; he exhorts us to embrace our essential mission as an evangelizing Church in the Holy Father’s signature encyclical, *Evangelii gaudium* / “The Joy of the Gospel”:

“In union with Jesus, we seek what he seeks and we love what he loves. In the end, what we are seeking is the glory of the Father; we live and act ‘for the praise of his glorious grace’ (Eph. 1:6). If we wish to commit ourselves fully and perseveringly, we need to leave behind every other motivation. This is our definitive, deepest and greatest motivation, the ultimate reason and meaning behind all we do: the glory of the Father which Jesus sought at every moment of his life. As the Son, he rejoices to be “close to the Father’s heart” (Jn 1:18). If we are missionaries, it is primarily because Jesus told us that ‘by this my Father is gloried, that you bear much fruit’ (Jn 15:8). Beyond all our own preferences and interests, our knowledge and motivations, we evangelize for the great glory of the Father who loves us.”

THE DIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCIL

A further phase of the mission and visioning process is the evolution of the Strategic Visioning Steering Group into a newly reactivated consultative body often found in many dioceses: the Diocesan Pastoral Council. Analogous to the role of the Pastoral Council in parishes, the Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC) presently includes several members of the original Steering Group in addition to several new members from various regions of the Diocese. The DPC's purpose is to serve as a consultative body to the Bishop with shared responsibility for the pastoral concerns of the Diocese.

Specifically, (1) it is to be an instrument of communication from the faithful of the Diocese to the Bishop; (2) it is to examine items that pertain to the pastoral works of the Diocese, considering specific issues and proposing practical conclusions; (3) and finally, it is to help coordinate and realize the ongoing strategic vision and pastoral planning processes for the Diocese.

Over the past year, the revived DPC has assumed responsibility for translating the overarching strategic priorities into practical tactics and action steps that can be adopted and amplified by the parishes and people of the Diocese. This adoption process is intended to come after a period of focused discernment at the local parish level, followed by a commitment to implement various initiatives over the next months and years. The DPC charged six commissions, each corresponding with one of the strategic priorities--to develop respective "toolkits" of resources including reflection questions, model prayers, and ministerial and practical measures that parish leadership and members might consider. The commissions did not start from scratch; they looked at existing practices within the Diocese at select parishes that are already displaying the sort of evangelical, Gospel-led, outward facing orientation to which we are all called as Catholics. There is so much already happening within our diocesan family that bears all the marks of the Spirit alive and flourishing in our midst, in places such as Holy Spirit Parish in Creston, St. Boniface in Waukee, St. Patrick in Imogene, and Sacred Heart in West Des Moines, to name a few!

In this regard, the commissions served as witnesses with hearts and minds attuned to the "greater works" Jesus promises will be achieved by those who cooperate with him and his Spirit (see John 14:12). The commissions and the DPC serve as heralds and agents of hope who help to draw us into greater unity and collaboration with one another. As the General Assembly First Session Synodal Synthesis report contends, *"Unity ferments silently within the Holy Church of God; we see it with our own eyes, and we bear witness to it full of joy."*



Let me clearly reiterate: the six toolkits included in this bundled “basket” represent a robust collective resource that beckons for patient and selective discernment and deliberation by each of our parishes. In no way are the toolkits and the visioning process intended to be a top-down mandate from on high, let alone a theoretical ‘programme’ from me, your Bishop, that you are obliged to simply passively obey and enact. To view the toolkits and the vision in such a dim light is a surefire recipe to stymie and deplete the Spirit’s potential among us.

Rather, I have great confidence and trust in the power of the Spirit working in every baptized and confirmed member of the faithful—and even beyond the bounds of our established parish communities. When we believe in the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit and engage and collaborate in this prophetic endeavor, we sow seeds of God’s Spirit. We cooperate with the Lord of the harvest by gathering the produce of the Kingdom realized in the mysterious presence of the Risen Lord among us.

PRIORITIES AND IMPLEMENTATION

“For the one God sent speaks the words of God. He does not ration his gift of the Spirit. The Father loves the Son and has given everything over to him. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.”

JOHN 3:34-36

“You know what to do with your farm, and does God not know what to do with you, his servant?” It’s high time for me to specifically identify the emergent priorities and proposed plan implementation timeline for the Diocese of Des Moines.

6 PASTORAL PRIORITIES

Following extensive listening sessions across the Diocese, the following six areas were identified as opportunities for growth within our parishes. Each of these priorities focuses upon different spiritual and human “fields” among our people.

1. Creating a Culture of Welcome and Care in our Parish Communities
2. Inviting People into an Encounter with Jesus Christ
3. Accompanying our Youth into Discipleship with Jesus Christ
4. Engaging our Young Adults into Full Participation
5. Preparing Disciples for the Domestic Church
6. Communicating our Message Boldly & Clearly



Creating a Culture of Welcome and Care in our Parish Communities

A welcoming parish is a reflection of Christian hospitality. Once we are welcomed, it is important to know we are cared for, that we matter to the life of the parish.

Inviting People into an Encounter with Jesus Christ

Jesus invites all of us to have a personal relationship with Him. The work of evangelization is an invitation into an encounter with Jesus which transforms us, our families, our parish, and our communities.



Accompanying our Youth into Discipleship with Jesus Christ

Walking with youth means meeting them where they are. Our youth are interested in making connections with their peers and forming lasting relationships.

Engaging our Young Adults into Full Participation

We seek to connect young adults with Jesus Christ, the Church as a welcoming Christian community, the mission of the Church in the world, and a peer community where faith is nurtured and strengthened.



Preparing Disciples for the Domestic Church

The family is placed at the heart of discipleship and mission. It is the privileged place for evangelization, catechesis, and spiritual growth.

Communicating our Message Boldly and Clearly

Good communication is at the core of helping people know and love God. It is the lynchpin in a thriving, active parish.

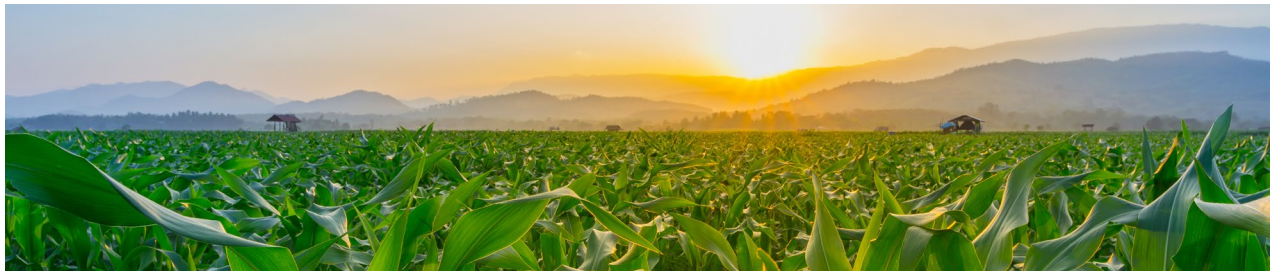


A SECOND REFLECTION: THE DIFFERENT SOILS IN WHICH WE SOW

There is far richer detail elaborated in the following six toolkits that correspond with the six priorities. Each of these priorities focuses upon different spiritual and human “fields” among our people. And if truth be told, each of these fields in our present culture and society, as well as in our Church, is a mixture of different types of soil. Some are more readily receptive and fertile. Some are well-worn as they have been trod in our familiar ways of doing things, including the delivery of ministries and modes of being church that have become exhausted and at risk of becoming inert or diverted to other interests.

Some fields are composed of rocky, shallow ground where the roots of faith were never nurtured or irrigated by ongoing formation and encounters with the living Christ and his Spirit. Lastly, some soil is thorny, where different forces and figures inflict wounds resulting from grief, from victimization and intolerance, from a lack of respect for human dignity, along with the consequent cynicism, loneliness, and despair that ensue.

If the parable of the Sower and the seed is our guide, God indeed seems to squander his seed and be less savvy than agricultural science or solely data-driven ministry would instruct us to be. Yet we are to follow God’s lead in our unflagging desire to bear good news and the Spirit of the Risen Christ to others. We are to be creative and bold in recognizing that God’s seed in itself bears the potential and power to transform the soil, regardless of favorable or unfavorable conditions. With the assistance of the Spirit, seeds of God’s word and sacraments can convert previously inhospitable soil into a substrate that bears Kingdom fruit in the lives of persons who long to know true love and abundant life.

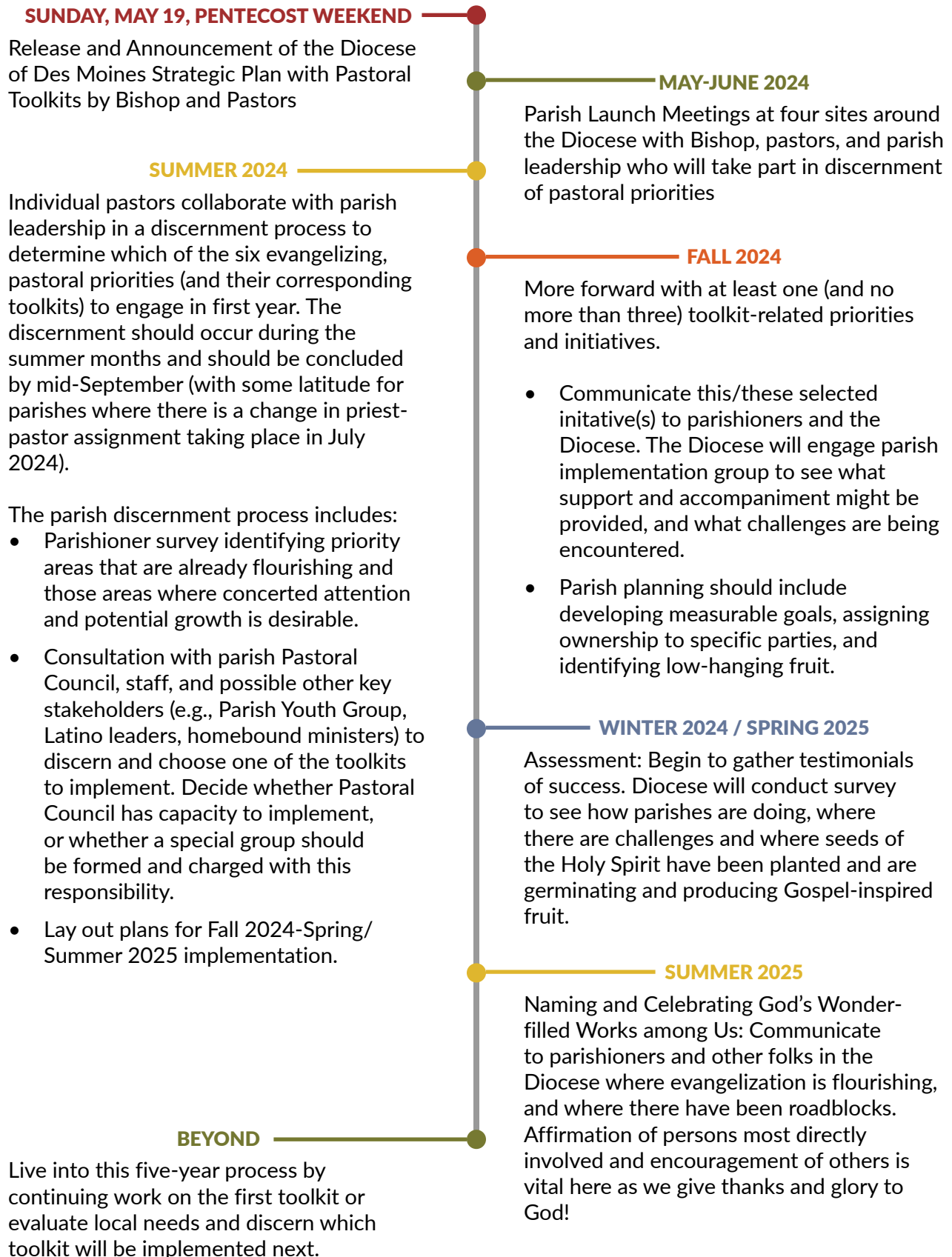


As the General Assembly First Session Synodal Synthesis report reflects, “Jesus saw his own destiny represented in a seed falling to the earth, something of no value or significance destined to decay, yet possessing the dynamism of life, a dynamism that is unstoppable, unpredictable, Paschal. This is a dynamism destined to give life; to become bread for many; bread destined to become the Eucharist.”

This is our charge: to be faithful and fearless, patient and persistent in pursuing diverse means of fostering encounters with the living Jesus made present in ourselves and other persons, in the Eucharist and other sacraments. We are to cultivate friendships on a spiritual and human level, thereby welcoming and drawing these relationships into the larger fold of the communion of faith who is the Body of Christ, the Church.

We are to conform ourselves to Jesus, our Savior and exemplar in showing us how to die to self in order to know and bestow life on others: *“Amen, amen, I say to you, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.” “Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honor whoever serves me” (John 12: 24, 26).*

STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE



CONCLUSION: COMMENDATION OF THIS VISION AND PLAN TO MARY, MOTHER OF THE EVANGELIZING CHURCH

“Mary, Virgin and Mother, you who, moved by the Holy Spirit, welcomed the word of life in the depths of your humble faith: as you gave yourself completely to the Eternal One, help us to say our own ‘yes’ to the urgent call, as pressing as ever, to proclaim the good news of Jesus.

Filled with Christ’s presence, you brought joy to John the Baptist, making him exult in the womb of his mother. Brimming over with joy, you sang of the great things done by God. Standing at the foot of the cross with unyielding faith, you received the joyful comfort of the resurrection, and joined the disciples in awaiting the Spirit so that the evangelizing Church might be born.

Obtain for us now a new ardour born of the resurrection, that we may bring to all the Gospel of life which triumphs over death. Give us a holy courage to seek new paths, that the gift of unfading beauty may reach every man and woman.

Virgin of listening and contemplation, Mother of love, Bride of the eternal wedding feast, pray for the Church, whose pure icon you are, that she may never be closed in on herself or lose her passion for establishing God’s kingdom.

Star of the new evangelization, help us to bear radiant witness to communion, service, ardent and generous faith, justice and love of the poor, that the joy of the Gospel may reach to the ends of the earth, illuminating even the fringes of our world. Mother of the living Gospel, wellspring of happiness for God’s little ones, pray for us. Amen. Alleluia!”

The principal patroness of the Diocese of Des Moines is Mary, Queen of Heaven. Her elevated place among God’s people is evident from the first moment of Jesus’s conception in her womb. She becomes the spouse of the Holy Spirit and participates with God in the Incarnation of God’s only begotten Son. Her closeness to her Son throughout his life impresses upon us her maternal tenderness and her formidable faith. She is unswerving in her devotion to St. John and all of us children entrusted to her by Christ on the Cross.

Mary’s special place among the newborn Church is likewise illuminated at the moment of the first Pentecost, where the Risen Lord appears in the Upper Room. In his encyclical dedicated to the Holy Spirit, *Dominum et vivificantem* / “On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World,” Saint John Paul II meditates,



“While it is an historical fact that the Church came forth from the Upper Room on the day of Pentecost, in a certain sense one can say that she has never left it. Spiritually the event of Pentecost does not belong only to the past: the Church is always in the Upper Room that she bears in her heart. The Church perseveres in prayer, like the Apostles together with Mary, the Mother of Christ, and with those in Jerusalem were the first seed of the Christian community and who awaited in prayer the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Church perseveres in prayer with Mary.”

We now embark with abiding trust and holy boldness upon the implementation of this Strategic Visioning plan in the lives of the people of Central and Southwest Iowa. We know that from the “first seed” of the early Christian community today many fruits, many new seeds of the Spirit have sprung forth and are entrusted to us to sow generously throughout the many local communities and the parishes that compose our Des Moines Diocese.

We take heart that Mary continues to accompany her Son’s Church and intercedes on our behalf. Like her Son, Mary is forever “for us” and will never forsake us. With the evangelical energy and good counsel of the Holy Spirit guiding our discernment, we enlist the practical wisdom and common sense of priests, deacons, religious, parish leaders, and lay persons of faith and good will who accompany us now, and who will soon, we pray, join our mission of Sowing God’s Spirit.

We may not put a hand to a physical plow, but we invest our hearts and minds in this Kingdom project of allowing God to save souls through us, drawn in hope by our common vision.

CULTIVATING CONNECTIONS IN CHRIST THROUGH ENCOUNTER, FRIENDSHIP, AND COMMUNION.

Please permit me one final reference that illustrates the harmony and concerted movements of the Holy Spirit in our local Church with the universal Catholic Church in this moment of salvation history. I cite again the General Assembly First Session Synodal Synthesis Report:

“With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it?” [see Mark 4:30]. Our Lord’s question throws light on the work that now lies ahead of us. It is not a matter of dispersing ourselves over several fronts, reducing everything to a logic of efficiency and proceduralism. Rather, it is a matter of grasping, among the many words and proposal of this Report [we may substitute ‘Plan’], what appears to be a small seed, yet one that bears the future, and of imagining how to bring it to the soil that will enable it to grow and mature for the benefit of many. ‘How will this happen?’, Mary asked herself in Nazareth (Luke 1:34) after hearing the Word. There is only one answer: remain the shadow of the Spirit and allow yourself to be enveloped by his power.”

Thank you for investing your time and good will in reading this introduction and in sampling (or more) the strategic priorities toolkits that follow. May God’s Spirit pour down abundant gifts upon you in the ever-unfolding mystery of his love. Let us pray that we all open ourselves to receive these gifts with radical dependence upon and trust in the Holy Spirit in all our personal and pastoral aspirations.

Come, Holy Spirit! Come ignite our hearts and seal the bonds of friendship and communion that are to be found in Christ, in union with Mary, Mother of the Evangelizing Church and Spouse of the Holy Spirit!

APPENDIX

- i Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, cited, in Hitz, *Lost in thought: The Hidden Pleasures of an Intellectual Life*, p. 110
- ii Weil cited in DeLorenzo, *In Search of a Full Life*, p. 59
- iii Sixteenth General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report (4-29 October 2023)*, 5
- vi Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 267
- v Sixteenth General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report (4-29 October 2023)*, 1
- vi Saint Augustine, cited in Haggerty, *Conversion*, p. 109
- vii Sixteenth General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report (4-29 October 2023)*, 40
- viii Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 288
- ix St. John Paul II, *Dominum et vivificantem* 66
- x Sixteenth General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report (4-29 October 2023)*, 40