

April 28, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Lord is risen! Alleluia! In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ we receive the forgiveness of our sins, the grace to enter into a loving relationship with God, and the hope of eternal life. In the Scriptures, the sacraments, and the entire life of the Church, we are able to grow in the glory of the risen Lord Jesus, as beloved children of the Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit!

In my travels throughout the diocese, I have come to realize that Catholics everywhere share the same spiritual hungers of the heart. We all want a deeper personal experience of Jesus' love and life. We all long to pray better. We all seek a Sunday experience of the Eucharist which nourishes our hearts and souls. We all desire excellent and inspiring preaching, liturgical music, and formation opportunities for ourselves and the next generation. We all crave joyful and deeper connections with other faithful Catholics. We all long to speak about our faith with others who do not know Christ with greater confidence and joy. And while I am convinced that God wants to meet these common spiritual hungers through His Church, the Church can only fully do so in parishes and schools which are equipped with excellent pastors, staff, and resources.

This pastoral excellence becomes hard to achieve when a priest is working alone in multiple parishes, the staff are minimal and overwhelmed, the number of people engaged in the life of the parish are aging and dwindling, and resources are fading. Many of the metrics of religious practice in our country are sadly moving in the wrong direction as secularism continues to grow. Sadly, marriages, baptisms, confirmations, and Mass attendance are all declining and have been for many years now.

I refuse to settle for a resigned acceptance of this diminishment, however, and I know that many of you feel the same way. Now is the time for us to boldly and courageously put out *into the deep*, as Jesus urged Simon Peter to do on the Sea of Galilee, and to reimagine our parishes and other institutions so that they might better flourish in the Holy Spirit, feed our people, and renew the world in the firepower of the Gospel. Imagine our priests working together in new ways, so that none of them feel alone or overwhelmed. Imagine full Masses everywhere with engaged disciples worshipping the Lord in joy and reverence. Imagine every parish having high quality

O F F I C E O F T H E B I S H O P

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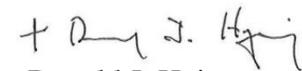
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discipleship formation, RCIA process, sacramental preparation, and evangelizing initiatives. Imagine every Catholic in the Diocese of Madison wanting to be an active member of the Church because every parish is gloriously alive in the Holy Spirit and their hearts are burning within them.

To achieve this vision of greater spiritual vibrancy and life, which is the goal of our *Go Make Disciples* evangelizing efforts, I am announcing a strategic planning initiative, “*Into the Deep*.” This initiative will involve a process of data research and analysis, followed by consultative input from both leaders and people all over the diocese, to move our parishes fully from maintenance to mission, to strategically realign our resources to serve the needs of our people today, to help our priests, leaders and people to fully flourish in the joy and power of our Catholic faith.

To help us with this process, the diocese has engaged the services of PartnersEdge, LLC, a Catholic group of professionals who have aided other dioceses all over the country to reimagine, align, and move the local Church into a healthier and more fruitful place of spiritual excellence and flourishing. We have no predetermined outcomes or plans in this endeavor, but will follow the data, research, analysis, and process. We will broadly consult everyone. We will take into account our rich history and spiritual values. And, above all, we will pray to the Holy Spirit and ask God to guide our efforts to serve Him and His Church with greater zeal and generosity, so the Gospel becomes ever more widely preached and the Catholic faith ever more vibrantly lived in our diocese. To set out *into the deep* requires faith, hope and courage. We have these gifts because the Lord is always with us in the gift of His One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

With joy in the risen Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "+ Donald J. Hying". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

+Donald J. Hying
Bishop of Madison