



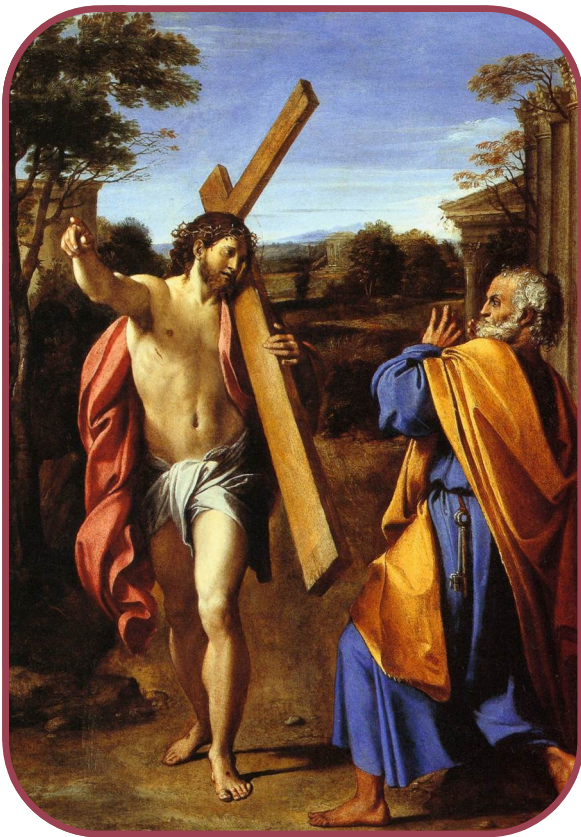
Lord, where are you going? Quo Vadis, Domine?



2014 PASTORAL LETTER

Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me
cannot be my disciple.

Luke 14:27



Dear Friends,

Reflecting on this passage of the gospel, I asked myself what the Lord is asking of me and our Church at this time. Suddenly, the legend of Domine quo Vadis surfaced in me. The story relates how St. Peter, facing a menacing future to his life and ministry as the leader of the Church of Rome, was urged by some around him to save himself from the coming Christian persecutions, by leaving the city and his post as head of the community. Before he could get too far and before he passed through Rome's city gates, St. Peter had an unusual encounter. Jesus appeared to him, walking in the opposite direction, causing St. Peter to pause and to ask the well-known question: Domine quo vadis? – Lord, where are you going? Jesus responded that he was going into Rome to be crucified again! Hearing this, St. Peter gains the courage to continue his ministry and returns to the city, to eventually be martyred by being crucified upside-down.

As I thought about this story, I imagined St. Peter, true to his impetuous self and character, making a decision to withdraw, perhaps imagining that he would be spared to come back at another time, to the community that had been placed in his hands. However, before he could get too far and before he passed through Rome's city gates, St. Peter encounters Jesus, whom he learns is preparing to face crucifixion once again! The legend of Domine Quo Vadis relates how an encounter with Jesus touched the heart of St. Peter and clarified St. Peter's call, giving him the courage to not only understand the importance of returning to his post, but to accept the cross of his role as head of the Church of Rome. St. Peter returned to the city and the martyrdom which awaited him, along with his fellow Christians. In their martyrdom, Christ was indeed crucified again but the Church grew in her mission.

Perhaps the reason this story surfaced in me, when I haven't thought of it for many years, is because at the centre of this transforming question, "Lord, where are

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you going,” we find the substance of our present experience and preoccupation for the future of our Church. In our way forward, expressed in our pastoral plan, we also need to ask “Lord, where are you going?”

On a personal note, I realized that the question of where Jesus is leading me and all of us in our local Church is a major struggle. The times and circumstances in which we find ourselves are nothing that any of us could have easily anticipated or wished for. Knowing what the Lord is asking of me and you at this time becomes crucial. Whatever we come up with as an answer, hopefully, will be as transforming a grace for us as it was for St. Peter. If Christ and the clarity of his direction are not behind this pastoral letter or the vision that motivates it, then we are wasting our time and energy.

Modern Martyrdom

The outcome of the Quo Vadis story is that St. Peter did what had to be done. It cost him his life by living it to the full, in spite of his weaknesses and failures. Today’s situation, where the Church is struggling to be real in a non-Christian culture, calls for personal courage, intelligent commitment and manifested consistency. For St. Peter, fidelity to Christ led to martyrdom. For you and me in today’s context, this is a call to authentic discipleship, effective apostleship and credible witness of life, not in the world of St. Peter but in our own secular city, which is a different, yet still hostile, cultural environment. To be a Christian today can still cost you your life in some parts of our world, as we have seen from daily news reports. Perhaps in our own world of Nova Scotia, the demand for fidelity to Christ may be different, but no less costly. For us, martyrdom is more about giving authentic witness, which is living one’s life fully for Christ, than about physically dying for Christ. It’s about dying to self so as to live for Christ!

In the past few years, you and I have been on a journey of faith, requiring trust and confidence, when all around us there continues to be loss of faith and a great deal of mistrust. Some, perhaps even the vast majority, of our fellow baptized Catholics appear to have turned away from the Church. So many of our families and friends, with anger in their hearts and shame in their spirit, have criticized the Church, expressed their disillusionment and have simply lost interest in “organized religion.” Our “Beyond the Pews” consultation clearly illustrated this.

Yet, in spite of such difficulties, we have tried to face the challenge of being Christ’s disciples in the world we have. In these past years and months, we have engaged in a slow process of returning to essentials, of rediscovering the Word of God, of experiencing the power of faith in small gatherings of real, even if at times hesitant, disciples. This is the thrust and direction that I have tried to promote in the vision of the New Evangelization. Many of you have responded with hope and the wish to rebuild a faith community based on the foundational experience of personally encountering Jesus Christ. We have prayed for a rekindling of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in us and we have engaged in a collective effort of understanding what is involved in the mission of evangelization.

“Wherever the need for the light and the life of the Risen Christ is greatest, it will want to be there. To make this missionary impulse ever more focused, generous and fruitful, I encourage each particular Church to undertake a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform.” (Pope Francis Evangelii Gaudium #30)



In our most recent Assembly of the People of God, we not only prayed and discerned, but also identified some key areas that are crying out for attention. Through this assembly and our Lenten Transformation Groups that helped us prepare for it, we expressed our hopes and expectations, which now must find concrete expression. After praying for a new Pentecost and exhorting each other to ignite our faith to the point of transforming our lives and our structures, the time has come to act – to give shape and form to some of our hopes in feasible, concrete gestures that are pastorally practical and fruitful.



The areas that have been highlighted for our concerted efforts are contained in three key words: **Mission, Community and Formation**. These are themes that were prayerfully discerned during our 2014 Assembly of the People of God. They are also aligned with Pope Francis's teaching that "the Church which 'goes forth' is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice" (*Joy of the Gospel* #24). In and of themselves, these words do not appear to be new, but their content is new. In fact, what is being proposed here is a major shift in our present self-understanding and in our self-expression as Catholic Christians.

1. Mission

The mission to which we are presently being called is to effectively do, in our times and in our world, what Christ came to accomplish, what St. Peter and St. Paul and all subsequent witnesses to the Gospel and Christian life have done. Christ's mission is to proclaim a vision of life and a hope for humanity, revealed in a culture of personal encounter and experienced in relationships of self-sacrificing love! This is presently counter-cultural! This is new for our times!

1. Mission

The challenge for Catholics is to take seriously the proclamation of an alternative way of being and living, which can touch the heart of humanity, and do it consciously and deliberately through commitment and action.

Jesus spoke about "the Kingdom of God," using terms that were relevant and understandable in his time. Now, we need to present the same concept in our own language and context, by speaking in terms of achieving a better world. We need to speak of a world where the truth and reality of God is not an idea, a philosophy or a political agenda, but where the truth of our Trinitarian God is founded on the personal experience of being loved; where love is a choice, a decision and a deliberate action, not just a feeling or wishful thinking.

Through the power of forgiveness, in the healing of the broken hearted, in the newfound freedom of being liberated from whatever oppresses, and in the care of the poor and those on the periphery of society, Jesus came to reveal to

"I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are. 'Mere administration' can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be 'permanently in a state of mission'." (EG #25)



humanity the love of God, which is an alternative truth, way and life. This is still our mission, and clearly it is, for our times and even in our Church, still an *alternative*. Though much of this has been lost to many, this is the alternative vision that must capture the imaginations of our faithful, our religious, and our deacons and priests – including this Archbishop!

When Jesus said, “I came that you might have life and have it in abundance,” he meant it. His words were more than a mission statement; they became the central shared experience of all Christ’s early disciples. To translate this experience into concrete actions today is to provide examples of applied Christian life for our families, parishes, regions and Archdiocese; to offer signs of hope by overcoming the spirit of futility so prevalent in so many of our friends and neighbours; to demonstrate by our actions that the Gospel can be lived!

This requires courage. Where can we find courage in our daily lives to effectively fight off paralyzing fear? Christ’s mission needs us to be rooted in the spirit of Christ, motivated by conviction, and founded on the experience that mercy, kindness and love are better than revenge, selfishness and hatred. How often have we been turned off by daily reports of hostility, of violence, of death and destruction? The only power that will conquer such darkness is the energy and power of love!

Christ’s alternative vision and mission are more than a pipe dream. It is the Gospel and the mystery of our faith. It is the promise made by Christ that we might choose abundant life. It is the Resurrection and the triumph of life over death. How can this alternative possibility of understanding and being Catholics and Christians for today be given shape and form in your parish and in your region? What does this mean for the Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth, if we hope to be a credible manifestation of where Christ’s abundant life can be found?

If continuing Christ’s mission is going to be the primary focus of our efforts, our Archdiocesan pastoral plan must be not only consistent with Christ’s teaching, but oriented towards the transformation of our parishes. This may require letting go of some of the leftovers from a past Christendom and its mindset, and moving toward the

formation of communities that are marked by a dynamic, personal, engaged Christian faith. These communities will vary based on location, population, and charism, but we will all be united in our fulfillment of Christ’s mission for us on earth.

“I dream of a ‘missionary option’, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.” (EG # 27)





To be a community of missionary disciples we must...

Bring the message of Christ's love and mercy to the wider community by

- Sharing the impact Christ has in our lives
- Inviting our friends, family and neighbours to experience the Gospel
- Creating spaces and places of hospitality and belonging

Minister to those in need by

- Visiting the sick, homebound and imprisoned
- Serving the poor and disenfranchised
- Mentoring and serving married couples
- Offering healing and reconciliation for families suffering the pain of divorce
- Recognizing and serving the unique needs of men, women, youth and children in our community

Allow the Holy Spirit to empower our mission by

- Prayerfully discerning and following God's will in all our activity
- Discovering the power of the Word of God
- Celebrating our faith in joyful worship



2. Community

To speak of rebuilding our Church is not to speak about repairing, reconstructing, or even maintaining what we had; nor is it about repeating what we have always done. That Church has largely disappeared. If we are going to interact with the present world, we need to be there! We need to develop the skills, the discernment and the mentality that lead us to see, recognize and acknowledge God present in all circumstances. This is the formation of heart and mind needed to bring about engaged communities of Christian faith.

Community of Disciples

Pope Francis has already given us an image of this community. Last summer in Rio at World Youth Day, he was speaking not only to young people but to the whole Church when he said that a community is not something perfect or only for the elite who qualify. He talked about a Church that is Samaritan, a Church of the street, at the crossroads of life – which is the very opposite of “a small chapel that commonly contains a small group” (my translation). The community that Pope Francis and the Gospel call us to requires openness of heart and a loving disposition. Think of your families and friends: they all have communities to which they belong



because they are welcomed and accepted. If your sons and daughters are not perfect you don't reject them, you don't stop loving them. If there are points of disagreement, you learn to cope with them. With such attitudes and qualities, dynamic Christian communities can and must become centres of welcome, providing opportunities for conversations and invitations for accompaniment on the spiritual journey, where people and their needs are respected and discernment is encouraged with time and patience.



It is my conviction that when we find ourselves in such living communities of faith, prayer is experienced as real and care for the poor actually takes place, because love is more than a four-letter word.

To be followers of Jesus Christ in this day and age must be more than going to church. To be a Catholic it is not enough to occasionally appear at worship or participate in some special circumstances. To be a Catholic follower of Christ is a personal relationship with Christ. Like all significant relationships, it requires attention, time, effort and a willingness to go beyond oneself. Developing such a relationship is the demanding process of making disciples, and the fruit of such an effort is a visible commitment to follow Christ seven days a week and in every circumstance of life.

This personal relationship with Jesus Christ, for the Catholic Christian on the path to maturity, will ultimately lead us to a renewed appreciation of celebrating and participating in the weekly gathering of the community on Sunday, the Lord's Day – not simply out of routine but out of the need to be nourished, challenged and changed by the Word of God in Scripture, and by the Bread of Life, which is Jesus, in the Eucharist.

I'm sure this sounds like some kind of idealized or even unrealistic expectation. In today's culture, of course, it is seen as unrealistic because this understanding of Christian life has in many instances been forgotten or put aside. This is why authentic Christian living needs to be rediscovered, which will take time. Building this kind of faith community will require gathering people in small groups to discover the Word of God, share each other's struggles with faith and hope, and experience the truth about God, who is love, and about Jesus Christ, who offers us the promise of new life and shows us the way to attain it!

“God attracts us by taking into account the complex interweaving of personal relationships entailed in the life of a human community. This people which God has chosen and called is the Church. Jesus did not tell the apostles to form an exclusive and elite group. He said: ‘Go and make disciples of all nations’ (Mt28:19).” (EG # 113)

This alternative way of living will not be popular or draw very many, at least not initially. We must take heart in the imagery of sowing seeds and allowing them to grow. Forming Christian communities of faith in our time will give a contemporary expression to the power of attraction that was found in the first Christian communities. As people then put their faith into action, so must we.

The Church of Christ is the “gathering” of the faithful disciples of Christ, the Ecclesia. The



“gathering” is the key because that is the context where we experience the source and summit of our Christian life. When we assemble for worship, in the liturgy and in the sacraments, that’s when Christ’s life and the mystery of His enfleshment can touch us. Unfortunately, the “gathering” has diminished in its appeal. 80% or so of baptized Catholics have stopped gathering.

Does coming together matter? Does it make any difference? Of course, when I take the

“The Church which ‘goes forth’ is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice. An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast.” (EG # 24)

time to pray and reflect about what makes a Christian community Christian, I conclude that coming together does matter and it does make a difference, even if this appears to no longer be true for the majority. How often has “religion” been reduced to rituals and to rites of passage? If many have become disenchanted with the Church, and our “Beyond the Pews” survey certainly confirms this, it’s because our parishes too often are not welcoming, our pastors are too busy holding the pieces together, our catechetical efforts are often too little and superficial, and too many of our adults are insufficiently formed in faith.

For many engaged in our Church, our best hopes, dreams and convictions are far from being realized. For those of us who feel this way, who experience disappointment, perhaps we can relate to the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, whose expectations were shattered when Christ was crucified. In the face of what seemed like a disaster,

they turned away discouraged. But it was in this very context that Christ was found. It was by reviewing their experience in the light of the Word of God, by providing an opportunity for encounter and dialogue, that Christ was recognized in the breaking of the bread. The disciples’ discouragement was transformed into zeal, and running away was changed into a return to the heart of the Gospel. To gather together, therefore, is for us both an expression of who we are and who we need to become. The gathering, the encounter, the dialogue—these are us on the road to salvation.

To be a community of missionary disciples we must...

Share Christ’s love and mercy with one another by

- Coming together in the Eucharist as members of one family
- Hearing, and acting on, the Word of God
- Praying with and for one another outside of the liturgy
- Creating small communities to serve and support one another
- Celebrating the sacraments with joy, intentionality, and reverence





Missionary Community

An alternative community of Christian faith calls for some serious adjustments in our manner of being Church. It will require all of us to rethink our expectations and demands; this will necessarily lead to changes in how our pastors exercise their pastoral ministry. Our laity and parishes cannot continue to define themselves as they did historically; parishioners must go beyond their past cultural expectations or risk being overly pre-occupied with the preservation of past glories or buildings, important as these symbols may be! We are not a museum or a heritage society. We are the people of God on a journey of faith, which at this time is a particularly demanding journey. We are constantly on the move and we must keep moving forward. If we don't, not only will we fall behind, we will die. In this context, only the essentials for the journey can be our priorities. If we are going to focus on essentials, then we must rediscover what it means to be the Church of Christ and let go of what has become excess baggage.

Our parishes, I believe, must become centres of hope and hospitality, where people and pastors can talk to each other and be kind and welcoming to one another. Our parishes must become places where time is found to speak, to listen, to be heard about our human condition and to draw from each other the new life of faith. Such vitality in individuals and in communities will be infectious by its person-centered attentiveness, where each and every one of us is important enough to be taken seriously. It is in such a context that the Holy Spirit will be felt and the Risen Christ be recognized.

The fruit of a transformed living community of faith will be the quality of life found there, a quality expressed by joy and experienced as caring love. It doesn't matter whether a parish is in the city or in a rural environment. The quality of faith and the quality of life of an authentic Christian community will manifest itself by personal commitment, by warmth in the relationship of parishioners and in the mutual care of people and pastors for each other. Service, in other words the *diakonia* of the whole Church, will be a real caring for each other and not just wishful thinking.

“Jesus did not say: ‘One of you go’, but ‘All of you go’: we are sent together. Dear young friends, be aware of the companionship of the whole Church and also the communion of the saints on this mission. When we face challenges together, then we are strong, we discover resources we did not know we had.” (July 28th Homily of Pope Francis, WYD 2013 in Rio)



This kind of community of faith can happen with the resources we presently have, but they will have to be tapped more effectively and efficiently. I believe we have all that we need if we are willing to adjust our expectations and modify our demands to fit the reality of where we are now. I also recognize that such an adjustment will be a major challenge and shift for our present parishes, because it means moving from a “what’s in it for me?” attitude to a missionary perspective that turns our attention to the future. This means turning our attention from the past and focusing our efforts on how our future faith community will be constructed by bringing all of our gifts and our talents in



the service of the mission.

Practically, what does this mean for each one of our parishes? Certainly, our parishes will have to assess their viability and make the adjustments required to provide the essential services of a community of faith. It may mean more pooling of resources in an area or in a region, but all of it must be driven by Christ's mission and not by a survival mentality.

With fewer human resources and diminishing financial realities, we cannot maintain all that we have inherited from the past. What do we keep? What do we let go? The Gospel tells us what the essentials are, as found in the Acts of the Apostles – gather in prayer, share the Eucharist, be faithful to the Apostles' teaching and hold everything in common. This is not only a spiritual reality; it has become a practical necessity.

Are we ready to take on these tasks? Only you can answer the question and time will tell.

To be a community of missionary disciples we must...

Organize our community around our mission by

- Showing and offering consistent care for the community
- Being good stewards of our financial and material resources
- Building awareness of opportunities to get involved
- Recognizing the hectic pace of today's world
- Using our gifts and talents to support our pastors
- Using technology to support our community, mission and formation

Participate in the life of the universal Church by

- Fostering a relationship of mutuality and accountability among our parishes, regions and diocesan offices
- Sharing resources and best practices across the diocese
- Building on our strengths by developing partnerships with nearby parishes



3. Formation

It is evident to me that a vision must be shared if it is going to be acted upon. All of the practical actions that our times call for will not be implemented at all, let alone fruitfully, if we do not come together on this task.

As Archbishop, I have never had any illusions about my role or my capacity to make anything happen of my own accord by some magical exercise of Episcopal authority. I have tried and continue to strive to share with you my convictions and my struggles, my hopes and disappointments. My experience has demonstrated beyond doubt that, alone, I cannot do any of the things that I write about in this pastoral letter. We must work together to build the Church Christ wants and needs for this time. To do this, we must consider Christ's call to each of us, and develop the personal and communal formation to become disciples of Christ in our world. What are some of these formation challenges?



Formation for Disciples

In each of our parishes we have committed people and resources for the Catechetical formation of children because this is a very important pastoral responsibility. In spite of its demands on our time, energy and finances, the catechetical ministry continues to suffer largely because we are trying to do what can't be done. **Catechetics without evangelization doesn't**

work. If there is no support from an evangelizing community of faith where priests, parents, catechetics and children are all part of the experience, the "program" doesn't accomplish the desired effect.

The catechesis of adults cannot be separated from the catechesis of children, and vice versa. This is a crucial ministry in every parish and it requires more than finding a few volunteers to look after it. The whole community is required for an effective evangelization and catechetical ministry that will be formative.

"The Lord's missionary mandate includes a call to growth in faith: 'Teach them to observe all that I have commanded you' (Mt28:20). Hence it is clear that that the first proclamation also calls for ongoing formation and maturation." (EG # 160)

Formation in faith is for all generations, times and circumstances. It is not about the number of programs a parish has the resources to run or the number of people who attend a class every week. This formation can occur in a variety of contexts based on what is most effective and realistic for the community itself. It is a means to help us grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ and his people. This will require the involvement of pastors and parishioners in a collaborative effort, without which nothing will happen. Leaders must be found and formed if faith is to be proposed and shared.

To be a community of missionary disciples we must...

Grow as disciples of Jesus Christ by

- Being part of a small Christian community within the larger community of faith
- Learning and teaching the faith in our families and in our homes
- Inviting Christ into each new stage of life
- Growing an ever deeper knowledge and appreciation of our Catholic faith
- Praying personally and daily
- Seeking spiritual direction to discern life decisions



Formation for Leaders

The issue of leadership is the one single and most important point raised by the consultation of the laity and priests in our recent Assembly of the People of God. That gathering had as its theme "Making all things new." Well, to make anything new in our Church at the moment, we need to address the many aspects of leadership.



Who is a Christian leader? Where do we find them? How do we train them? What do we expect of them as Christians who live in the world? What particular gifts do they bring to the Church? What level of responsibility are they able to assume at the parish, regional and diocesan level? We cannot take any of these matters for granted. The questions must be answered by us, here and now.

Although it is crucial that we acknowledge and support those particularly called to service in the Christian community, we must also recognize that at the heart of this vision for the future of our local Church is the place and role of **collaborative and shared leadership**. Too often, when we speak about leadership in the Church we think of the Pope and the bishops; sometimes we include the priests, and occasionally we may even include a few

laity. The general impression is that leadership is the work and responsibility of just a few.

This is only partially correct. There are certain leadership responsibilities held by a few, but there is also the collaborative leadership responsibility of every baptized follower of Christ. In our day to day lives, we must *all* be leaders in our faith and mission. In our present circumstances this co-responsibility must be urgently activated and must be a central facet of our faith formation efforts. Not only must we make disciples, but we must transform every disciple into an apostle of Jesus Christ so that the leadership and responsibility of all the faithful is actively engaged. This means identifying who in the parish are the community leaders, but it also involves seeing, recognizing and activating the gifts and talents of every member of the Body of Christ, so that the whole body is working as it should. Leadership is not primarily about standing up in front of the crowd or about exercising power. It is also “leadership” when each person does, at his or her level, what is uniquely that person’s role to do. If the foot does not work properly, the whole body suffers. Leadership is a shared service, not a power.



“On the lips of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over: ‘Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.’” (EG # 164)

If we keep expecting someone else to do it, it won’t get done! The Gospel will not be heard if we keep waiting for evangelists and ordained ministers to come from somewhere else. You and I are the ones entrusted at this time with carrying on the mission of Christ. We can’t do it all and we can’t do it alone, but no one else is coming to do what is in our hands to do! We must be encouraged by the conviction that in our Church we have what is necessary for the mission to be accomplished. As St. Paul reminded the

Ephesians, some will be apostles, some will be prophets, evangelists, pastors, or teachers to build up the Body of Christ (cf. Ephesians 4:11-16).

I will be counting, therefore, on the leaders we have – our priests, deacons, religious and laity – to come together to re-think our roles and responsibilities, to draw on each other’s experiences and talents, to prepare ourselves to lead the Church God has entrusted to us.

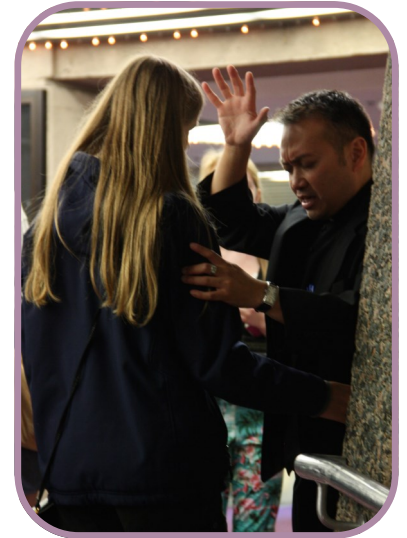


We will also engage in a concerted effort to identify and form new leaders from our present communities to take up the work that must be done in our parishes, regions and in our Archdiocese. There is an urgent leadership vacuum in the area of adult faith formation and in the area of formation for marriage and family life. These priorities have already surfaced in our Church. Well, who is going to do the work? All of us! Together!

To be a community of missionary disciples we must...

Empower disciples for leadership by

- Praying that God will help us all to take up the challenge of leadership in our own lives
- Participating in the sacramental life of the Church
- Creating small support groups for leaders
- Helping people identify and use their gifts and charisms
- Offering ongoing leadership training and formation



Formation for Service

Within the changing structures of our present Church, we must pay careful attention to the matter of service in a Christian community. A dynamic Christian faith community must identify those it needs to uphold the ministry of the Word, the ministry of service to the poor and needy; it must also be concerned with challenging those called to teach and celebrate the sacraments. This can only be done with the help and discernment of the Holy Spirit.

Those faithful specifically called to the diverse **ministries of service** within our Christian community – our priests, deacons, catechists, lay leaders, and others – need to be supported by the entire community. The feedback we received from our Transformation Groups and our 2014 Assembly of the People of God makes it clear that one of these supports must be active and deliberate formation to help them better exercise their ministry. Too often, we recruit people to serve in our parishes but do not provide the tools and supports to build them up for the role. Formation for service is essential for the continuance and growth of our local Church, and cannot be an afterthought or addition when possible. We need to build this support into our planning to ensure we provide it when and where it is needed.

To be a community of missionary disciples we must...

Empower disciples for service by

- Praying for our leaders, particularly our pastors
- Praying for vocations to the religious life and priesthood
- Forming leadership teams from various vocations
- Providing specialized human resources for sensitive pastoral needs (Confessors/Counselors, parochial administration, etc.)
- Having clear roles and expectations for all members of our community (Deacons, Priests,



Episcopal Vicars, Lay People, Diocese, Region, Committees, etc.)

- Ensuring continuity of leadership and smoother transition of pastors
- Serving local communities with competent staff and consultants



Formation for Sacraments

In the formation of leaders for our Christian communities, there is special care and attention to be given to the sacramental life of the faithful. There is a need to shape and form those directly involved with the proximate preparation of the sacraments because we must move away from a programmatic or religious education approach to sacramental preparation, which continues to be the primary model of our catechesis of children, to one that is personal, developmental and community based.

The sacraments are encounters with Jesus Christ, and as such they must be personal as well as communal experiences, where the Person of Jesus Christ is met and heard, where the response is to know, love and serve Christ as Lord.

It would seem necessary, therefore, that those involved in sacramental preparation adopt and mirror a personal and communal approach to the preparation of the parents and the children. It is this personalist perspective that needs to become part of the spiritual and human formation of priests, deacons, religious and all involved in the ministry of faith transmission in all its facets.

In this spiritual and human formation for facilitating the experience of personally being touched by Christ in the sacraments, there must be knowledge and understanding, but also some freedom and flexibility with different ways that our common catechetical instrument, “Be My Disciples,” is used and implemented in our parishes.

“Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others and this can happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey.” (EG # 127).

In our formation possibilities, we must provide opportunities for the faithful of our parishes to be trained and encouraged to become mentors and companions for the newly baptized, confirmed and married. There is a need to re-discover the original role and responsibility of “sponsors,” Godfathers and Godmothers, who come from the community of faithful disciples. Some of our parish leaders will require formation to be attentive to the sick and particularly to those on the last days of their faith journey.

Pastoral leaders and catechists are members of our communities who are ready to be engaged and willing to undergo the necessary formation, to make the prayer life of our community significant, to help make our sacraments encounters with Christ and to facilitate the experience of receiving the Word of God as a living word.

Specifically for those called to the ministry of Catechesis, it is my hope to put in place



some standards to be maintained by our Catechists and some basic accreditation requirements for the exercise of this ministry. Catechetical formation, therefore, will be an important goal to put in place. This formation will require knowledge of the faith, the shared vision for faith

“A Church which ‘goes forth’ is a Church whose doors are open. Going out to others in order to reach the fringes of humanity does not mean rushing out aimlessly into the world.” (EG # 46)

transmission as the New Evangelization of our Archdiocese, some fundamental understanding of the teachings of the Catholic Church. Hand in hand with this Catechetical formation, we must consider the formation we offer our faithful for the reception of the sacraments. Do we ensure in our parishes that those seeking sacraments are properly formed and disposed to receive them? This is not to say we will present a “one-size-fits-all” approach for training Catechists and

determining a child’s suitability for the sacraments. If we intend the sacraments to be personal encounters with Christ we must treat them as such, and prepare our faithful accordingly, rather than seeing the sacraments as rites of passage or year-end rituals. Personal attention, including assessments that take the *person* into account, rather than just age or time of year, are essential if we hope to reform our transmission and revitalize our understanding of sacraments in the Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth. Too often, baptism is talked about as getting the baby done, and confirmation is referred to as the point when young people stop going to church. Confession has largely disappeared in the life of most Catholics and marriage is becoming the forgotten sacrament! These statements, to which many grandparents, parents and pastors can relate, reflect how our Church’s sacramental life is viewed by so many and argue in favour of why an alternative perspective needs to be presented.

It is my great hope and wish that Catechetical leaders in every parish will be able to assist families to exercise their responsibility as the first teachers of their children in the faith, by providing practical direction and useful input into family based models for preparing young disciples, that these leaders would personalize the approach to sacramental preparation and that in this effort of accompaniment, not only would community be built up, but persons would slowly be transformed into becoming themselves, sacraments of Christ.

To be a community of missionary disciples we must...

Celebrate the Sacraments with joy, intentionality, and reverence by

- Being properly disposed and formed to celebrate the sacraments, when the person is ready and not before
- Freely choosing the sacraments as individuals or families
- Providing particular formation for catechists
- Walking with the newly initiated and those discerning or entering new vocational stages
- Assisting those who are sick and standing by them at the end of their journey of life
- Identifying, accompanying and encouraging those who seek to serve the Church as responsible lay leaders or in the religious life or ordained ministry





Meeting the Challenge Ahead of Us

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’” Luke 14:28-30

In St. Luke’s gospel, which puts before us the cost of discipleship and the need for careful discernment, Jesus is asking any who would follow him if they are aware and prepared to do whatever it takes to be his disciples. Such a commitment involves a serious self-assessment of our motivations, abilities, limitations, hopes and fears. With such a clearer knowledge of ourselves, it is possible to move forward with greater freedom. Knowing what our mission will cost should not deter us from our enterprise but it should make us even more keenly aware of the need for God’s grace

As we consider the task before us, if we are to truly become a community of missionary disciples in our modern times, are we ready to pay the price? For St. Peter in the Quo Vadis story, the cost was the pain and humiliation of crucifixion and death. For us, the costs may be different but they still exist. Fortunately, the hope and promise of the resurrection more than exceeds any earthly costs.

In order for us to meet the challenge that lies ahead of us, I propose a course of action that begins with each community of faith assessing its members as followers of the Lord. From this position we can set forth on a course of action where each of our local communities will call on the Holy Spirit to enkindle again the power of love for our members, to infuse our strengths with God’s grace in order to overcome our weaknesses.

The timing for each phase of this pastoral plan has been developed in consultation with our pastors to help take into consideration the ebb and flow of parish life. Each step needs to be done in prayer and grounded in the Word of God. Decisions for change and growth must be made at the local level. For all the authority given to me as a bishop, I cannot impose change – at least not heartfelt and lasting change. Such change and spiritual transformation must come from our shared conviction and commitment to the mission of Jesus Christ. There is much to be done and all of it will require time. What I propose is a five year plan of action with **Mission, Community** and **Formation** as our three areas of focus. You have told me these are the areas where we need to make substantial changes and where action must take place. I have listened and I agree. To help in this endeavour a discernment tool has been developed to help parishes gauge their current reality in light of the actions and goals presented in this letter. My hope is that it will help guide our parishes in their journey ahead. Some of these goals will not be accomplished in the next five years. However, the principles and foundation for this mission will be strengthened where they exist and established where they don’t. These principles are universal, though they will be applied and lived out differently based on a community’s resources, population and local context.

What we are being asked to do is not easy. Change never is, yet this is the transformation of persons and structures that the Gospel calls for in our present circumstances.

Where will we be in five years? Only God knows, but as we journey along we will discover it. Hopefully, we will have done our part to make a difference. I pray and hope that, in our Church



of Halifax-Yarmouth, we can shift our minds and hearts from an attitude of pastoral consumerism and functionalism to an attitude of personal commitment as missionary disciples, renewed by the fire of the Holy Spirit because of our personal encounter and relationship with Jesus Christ. May our Church be new again and may we go with Christ down the road where He is leading us.

†Anthony Mancini
Archbishop of Halifax-Yarmouth



“It is the Risen Christ who tells us, with a power that fills us with confidence and unshakeable hope: ‘Behold, I make all things new’ (Rev 21:5).” (EG # 288)

