

"BE HOLY, AS YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER IS HOLY".
(Mt. 5:48)

"The Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and every one of His disciples, regardless of their situation. Thus it is evident to everyone that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status are called to the fullness of the Christian Life and the perfection of charity. All of Christ's followers, therefore, are invited and bound to pursue holiness and the perfect fulfillment of their proper state". (LG # 40-42)

As Bishop of the Diocese of Tyler, I have attempted to remind each member of the diocese to respond to the invitation of Christ to His Disciples, "Be holy as the Lord your God is Holy" (Mt. 5:48). I have done this in particular by establishing the process of Christian Initiation and in encouraging the renewal of the Liturgical celebrations in every Parish and Mission. Now, I am calling upon all of the Faithful in the diocese to enter into a process of living authentically your particular vocation to holiness. By praying for one another; by encouraging each other in our individual walk with Christ; and by being good witnesses of our Christian discipleship, we will continue to mature as faithful followers of Jesus Christ. This holiness is essential to support the processes of Christian Initiation and Liturgical renewal in our diocese. This holiness of life is also crucial to sustain each in his/her vocation to: the single state, the Sacrament of Marriage, the Sacrament of Holy Orders and Consecrated Life.

Through Baptism, God calls us to live as members of the Body of Christ. We are made children of God (Phil. 2:15), brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ (Mt. 12:49), and members of the household of God (Eph. 2:19). We are commanded to "love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all your mind, with all of your soul, and with all of your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself". (Mk. 12:30-31) We live out this command through a life of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. (Mt. 6: 1-8, 16-18) To be holy is to be in a continual process of conversion, so that more and more we may die to self and live for Christ. (Phil. 1:21)

The forms and tasks of life are many, but holiness is one - that sanctity which is cultivated by all who act under God's Spirit and, obeying the Father's voice and adoring God the Father in spirit and in truth, follow Christ, poor, humble and cross-bearing, that they may deserve to be partakers of his glory. Each one, however, according to his own gifts and duties must steadfastly advance along the way of a living faith, which arouses hope and works through love. (LG # 41)

As each of us lives out our particular vocation, we are called to deepen in our consecration to God and our growth in holiness. This is what it is to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ. We follow Jesus the "Way, Truth and Life" (Jn. 14:6), serving Him in our every thought, word and deed. We are invited to live out our particular vocation to holiness in a process of prayer and discernment as disciples of Jesus Christ. We are to mature in our love of and our participation in our holy Catholic Church. We need to know our strengths and weaknesses; our aspirations and limitations; our talents and abilities to determine how each person will live out his/her vocation to holiness in a particular lifestyle. To live out our true vocation presupposes both the ability to discover God's call, and the willingness and generosity to respond to it at the deepest level of our being with the help of God's grace.

Some live out their call to holiness and to be disciples of Jesus Christ by serving their brothers and sisters in the single state. Some are called to the Sacrament of Marriage and to family life. Some are called to ordained ministry in the Sacrament of Holy Orders as Bishop, Priest or Permanent Deacon. Further, some of the laity and clergy are called to give their lives to Christ in a radical way as men and women in the Consecrated Life. In the Catholic Church, all vocations are honored, and all vocations work together in the service of holiness and mission.

To foster a vocation culture in our diocese, where all the baptized are consciously discerning their response to their individual vocation to holiness, I urge that the families, parishes and missions of the diocese join together in implementing the following process.

INVITATION TO PRAYER.

In his Apostolic Letter, "NOVO MILLENNIO INEUNTE", Pope John Paul II makes the observation that, "Despite widespread secularization, there is widespread demand for spirituality, a demand which expresses itself in large part as a renewed need for prayer". (No. 33) It is in this "need of prayer" that we place our united prayer before the Lord "that we may be holy as the Lord our God is holy" (Mt. 5:48).

It is for this reason that all of the faithful are urged to gather with their Pastor, and/or Deacons, to pray for the Spirit of holiness and discipleship in the Diocese of Tyler. At the center of all prayer initiatives there is the Eucharist. The Sacrament of the Altar has a decisive value for our growth in holiness as we contemplate His Divine Presence. To develop a generous response to our vocation to holiness and discipleship, I request that there be periods of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in EVERY Parish and Mission at the least on a monthly basis. I ask the faithful to pray for an increase in the awareness of, and response to, the vocation to holiness and discipleship among ALL of the faithful in the Diocese. Where periods of Adoration are already established, I request that these continue. I ask that, wherever possible, at the least one hour each week be specifically dedicated to this intention.

RECOGNITION FOR ALTAR SERVERS.

The Altar Servers in the Diocese of Tyler present to us a number of young persons that are in love of and in service to the Eucharist. For this reason, I will like to establish a Diocesan Day of Celebration, Appreciation and Recognition for Altar Servers, and for their ministry to Christ and to His Holy Church. This day will be coordinated by the Vocation Office, with the help of those involved in their training.

ESTABLISHING HOLINESS AND DISCIPLESHIP TEAMS.

Recognizing the universal call, or vocation, to holiness and to discipleship, the Diocese of Tyler is organizing a vocation process to assist our efforts both as individuals and as a Community of Faith. To organize and coordinate this vocation process. I am establishing a Holiness and Discipleship Team that will work with the Presbyteral Council, Diaconal Council, the Discernment Board (formerly the Vocation Awareness Board) and the appropriate offices of the curia in supporting our Diocesan efforts toward our growth in holiness and discipleship.

Further, I ask that in every parish and mission there be established a Holiness and Discipleship team that will help to organize and to implement this third process of my pastoral plan for the Diocese. I call especially on the Knights of Columbus, the Ladies Guilds, the Catholic Daughters, the Council of Catholic Women, the Cursillistas, the Charismatic Movement and other members of parish organizations to help form these parish teams.

EXPLORING PATHS TOWARD HOLINESS

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory, and then he will repay everyone according to his conduct." (Mt. 16: 24-27)

As Jesus invited his disciples, I ask that these Parish Holiness and Discipleship Teams have, as a part of their service, the INVITING of some of our youth (from 12 years or older) to a half day (or evening) of reflection and discussion on our common vocation to holiness and discipleship. These gatherings could be held at individual parishes, or with several parishes and missions clustering together, or on the deanery level. Here, the young persons would reflect upon their baptismal call to holiness and to the following of Jesus as His disciple. They would meditate upon and discuss the call to serve God and His Holy Church. Young persons could view

a video tape (available at the Vocation Office) on the different Vocations to the Priesthood, Permanent Diaconate, Consecrated Life, and The Sacrament of Marriage or to the single state. This could be followed by a discussion period. A Priest, Deacon, Consecrated Religious, Married Couple and/or a committed Single person could be invited to speak about their particular vocation story during these gatherings. The individual parish, mission, or cluster would be free to develop its own Holiness and Discipleship program.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

I fully understand that developing a vocation culture throughout the Diocese of Tyler will take a very long time. In our diocese, parishes and missions, there are already some programs dedicated to promoting one's growth in holiness and discipleship especially among those in the single state, in the Sacrament of Marriage and in family life. Among these programs are: the LIFE program, the Christian Initiation of Adults (in English and Spanish) Scripture courses, the Catechetical programs for our children and youth, the Cursillo movement, the Charismatic prayers groups, Engaged and Marriage encounter weekends and others. I fully support and encourage all who give of their time and talents in organizing and providing these avenues of God's grace for our faithful. I am open to promoting other programs that have not been introduced to the Diocese that would help in the development of this culture of vocation. The Diocesan Holiness and Discipleship Team will assist in identifying opportunities to future development in these areas.

PROCESS FOR THE DISCERNMENT OF VOCATIONS TO THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY ORDERS AND CONSECRATED LIFE.

It is my earnest intention to respond to the immediate need that we have to awaken vocations to the Priesthood, Permanent Diaconate and to Consecrated Life from our families, parishes and missions. I want to provide the following process that will help our local Church in calling forth some of our young persons to discern a vocation to the Sacrament of Holy Orders and to Consecrated Life:

I. RESTRUCTURING OF THE VOCATION OFFICE

The Diocesan Vocation Office will be renamed to become the Office for Vocations to Holy Orders and Consecrated Life.

The Vocation Director for the Diocese of Tyler will be assisted by another priest, religious sister and a permanent deacon. Together these will comprise the Vocation Team. The current Vocation Awareness Board will be modified to serve as a Discernment Board. A representative from the Discernment Board will serve on the Holiness and Discipleship

Team, along with the staff of the Vocation Office and others as appointed by the Bishop.

II. "COME AND SEE WHERE I STAY ". (Jn. 1:38-39)

"Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to him, 'Rabbi' (which is translated Teacher), 'where do you stay?' He said to them, 'Come and see'. So, they went and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day". (Jn. 1: 38-39)

We remember how it was that St. Andrew brought his brother, Simon Peter, to Jesus (Jn. 1:42). From these local Holiness and Discipleship Discernment programs, the Pastor and/or members of his parish team will bring those who show interest in vocations to the Sacrament of Holy Orders or to Consecrated Life to a day of vocation discernment sponsored by the Diocesan Vocation Office. In these reflection days, we will reflect on the Word of God, celebrate the Eucharist, and share in Christian fraternity. I ask the Discernment Board to be of help and assistance in this endeavor.

III. "COME TO ME, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST" (Mt. 11:28)

"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon your shoulders and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart: and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light". (Mt. 11:28-30)

Those young persons, (male and female at least 16 years old), who are seen with some promise of a Vocation to the Ordained Ministry or to Consecrated Life will be invited by the Vocation Directors to attend a weekend Vocation Discernment Retreat. There will be two separate retreats: one for males, and one for females. This weekend retreat will be sponsored and organized by the Diocesan Vocation Office.

IV. "LORD TEACH US TO PRAY" (Lk. 11:1)

"God Father has revealed His almighty power in the voluntary humiliation and Resurrection of his Son, by which he conquered evil. Christ crucified is thus 'the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men'. (1 Cor. 1:24-25)

It is in Christ's Resurrection and exaltation that the Father has shown forth 'the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe'. (CCC #272)

It is in this attitude of maturing in the knowledge and appreciation of the richness of our Catholic Faith, that from this group of young men and women, I will select certain individuals who look promising to enter into a ten month discernment process with the Diocesan Vocation Directors.

During this period, each young person will attend a monthly overnight Vocation Retreat. They will learn to pray the Office. They will be taught the basics of meditation, and they will learn more about the Vocation to the Ordained Ministry and to Consecrated Life through the studying of Papal and Church Documents. The young persons will choose an approved Spiritual Director, and will be expected to meet with him/her once a month. Each will follow an approved daily Rule of Life on an individual basis.

V. "COME, FOLLOW ME" (Jn. 21:19)

At the end of this discernment time, I as shepherd of local Church will encourage some among this group to continue their discernment process toward the Priesthood, or Consecrated Life by applying to a Seminary or to a Religious Congregation. Those interested in the Permanent Diaconate will discuss this option with the Vocation Directors.

In closing, I place this great effort under the Patronage of the Holy Family. It was there, at Nazareth, that Jesus, Mary and Joseph lived their individual vocation to life and love; to holiness and discipleship; to witness and to service. Modeling our lives after theirs, may each of us be faithful to our own individual vocation. I am confident that if we ALL join together in implementing this Vocation process, and developing this vocation culture within our Diocese, God will grant each of us a renewal IN OUR PERSONAL call to holiness and discipleship. May He bless us with an ever increasing number of holy families living out the Sacrament of Marriage. May He also grant us the grace to call forth from our families, parishes and missions many more vocations to the Priesthood, Permanent Diaconate and to Consecrated Life to serve our Diocese and the Universal Church.

Your Servant in Jesus Christ,

+ Alvaro Corrada del Río, S.J.
Bishop
Diocese of Tyler

Feast of St. Joseph the Worker, May 1, 2004