

SO THAT THEY MAY ALL BE ONE

A Pastoral Letter on the Strategic Vision
and Mission of the Diocese of St. Augustine



by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez

TO

THE PEOPLE OF THE DIOCESE OF ST. AUGUSTINE:

Grace and Peace to you! I am thankful, as your bishop, to hear of your powerful experiences – the lived experiences of the Body of Christ – the Church of the Diocese of St. Augustine.

Many things are drawing us together as one faith, one family in the Lord: The seven diocesan-wide listening sessions this past fall, the annual Eucharistic Congress, my parish visits and the recently completed Year of Mercy.

I see our path in ensuing years to be quite clearly expressed by you. What you have asked of me can be summed up in the question: “As stewards of Christ’s mission, what am I called to be and do?”

God gave to each of us at birth a great purpose and dignity.

Through baptism, we are joined by a “more intimate union with Christ,” (CCC #2014) a union that calls every one of us to live a life of “holiness.” Being “holy” means to surrender our will to God’s will, to be set aside for God and to be willing to live and speak the “truth” that is Christ to a world that greatly needs it. Holiness calls us to be something quite different than what society might desire – it calls us to stand with Christ and to orient our

lives and actions toward that which is truly good and beautiful.

As members of Christ’s Body, holiness calls us to:

- Strong family life
- Generosity of heart
- Joyful sacrifice
- Concern for others

As I listened to your experiences in your quest to answer your baptismal call to holiness, these words come to mind: “*As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, so may you live always as a member of his body, sharing everlasting life.*”

Through these words found in the rite of baptism, we were anointed for our mission – to be in this world and to have a positive impact on this world, but to never forget that we are holy and created by God and for God.

In our encounters, I have noticed your strong desire to reach out and to be welcoming to all, in particular, those we encounter at various points along the way. To engage and accompany those who struggle to find the way; those who have fallen away, and those who never knew or are searching to find the way. We meet and journey alongside them every day – they are Catholics, non-Catholics, those of some faith, and those of no faith at all; they are our families, friends,

members of our parish community, coworkers, and others we encounter on the street. You have voiced your concerns to me about all of these, in particular, you are concerned with our rich diversity of youth who are the now and the future. You wish for all of these that they should come to know and live as one in the love of Jesus Christ.

OUR VISION **“That they may all be one!”**

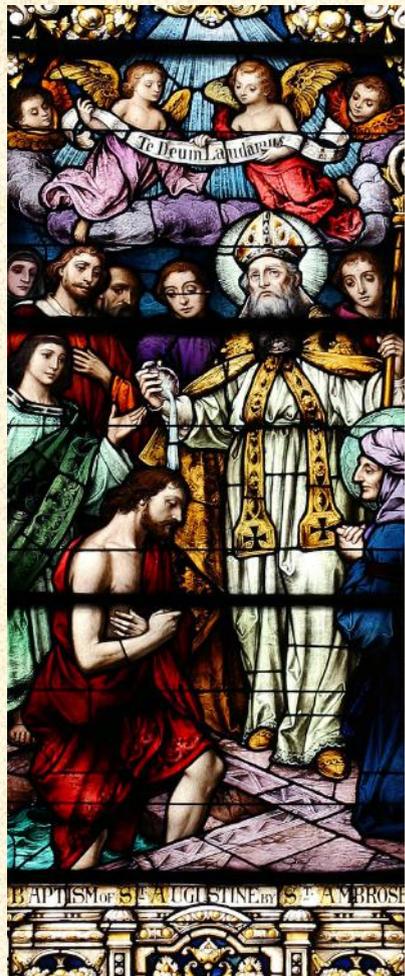
In the Gospel of John, Jesus says: *“I pray not only for them but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me”* (Jn 17:17-21).

I, too, pray that we may all be one, just as the Father and Son are one in the Holy Spirit. It is a cry for unity and oneness, connectedness, that I feel from you, the faithful.

Our patron Augustine describes how in the Eucharist we are ground together into one loaf, one body:

“In this loaf of bread, you are given clearly to understand how much you should love unity. I mean, was that loaf made from one grain? Weren’t there many grains of wheat? But before they came into the loaf they were

all separate; they were joined together by means of water after a certain amount of pounding and crushing. Unless wheat is ground, after all, and moistened with water, it can’t possibly get into this shape which is called bread. Then came baptism, and you were, in a manner of speaking, moistened with water in order to be shaped into bread” (Sermon 272).



“Answering our baptismal call is a continual process of conversion – of becoming united to the heart of Christ and joined more fully to the sacramental life of his Church.”

If we are to become Eucharistic people – we must make a sacrificial offering of our lives to the service of one another. As Pope Francis encourages us, “The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* #47).

We join ourselves to the prayer of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and we go out to the world from Mass on a mission to gather what is scattered into the one Kingdom, and we do it all for the greater glory of God (*Didache*). There is no “us” or “them;” there is only one Body of Christ.

OUR MISSION
“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations”

Jesus calls us to be disciples just as he instructed his followers 2,000 years ago.

“All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all

nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Mt. 28:16-20).

Pope Francis further develops this missionary imperative in his beautiful apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*. In this work, our pope calls us to live the Gospel with great joy, and he provides us with a working definition as to what it means to be a “missionary disciple.”

“Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries,” but rather that we are always ‘missionary disciples’ (E.G., #120).

The Lord has blessed our diocese with a gifted diversity of people – every one of them important to communicating our beautiful faith to all. Each of you has a giftedness that we need to do this important work. I am confident that in our diocesan pastoral plan and the plans of our parishes and schools you will find

a need to contribute. We are a Eucharistic people who find our strength, our very center, in Jesus Christ and his spouse the Church for in fact both are inseparable (Eph. 5:29-32). The task ahead is indeed a daunting but important one, but Fear not! – because in Christ Jesus all things are possible.

Our Overarching Strategies

The call to missionary discipleship begins with our encounter with Jesus. This encounter with Christ invites us to a change of heart and mind that is forever life changing (*metanoia*). Answering our baptismal call is a continual process of conversion – of becoming united to the heart of Christ and joined more fully to the sacramental life of his Church. In so doing, our lives gain an integrity where our consciences become more fully formed, and our actions are made one with the will of God (formation). As we are formed in the knowledge of the faith and grow closer to Jesus, that communion with Christ draws us into deepening communion with one another and with his Body, the Church (connectedness). Imbued with the love, mercy, and joy of Jesus Christ; we are prepared and driven to encounter the world as missionary disciples. This is not something we do because we are asked, but

something we know we must do because it flows uncontrollably from who we have become – one in Christ (outreach).

Formation

We cannot give what we ourselves do not have

Pope St. John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* #33 summed up three objectives of the Church's missionary activity:

- **To proclaim the Gospel to all people;**
- **to help bring about the reconversion of those who have received the Gospel, but only live it nominally; and**
- **to deepen the Gospel in the lives of believers**

Introducing people to the Gospel and, therefore, helping them to develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ begins with conversion, a change of heart, an introduction to the fullness of the life-giving message found in the Gospel.

In every age, the Gospel calls us to: *“Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence”* (1 Peter 3:15).

The call to pass on the faith today is not just a call to pass on what we have already come to know – it is much more than that.

Missionary discipleship challenges us to a more deliberate, lifelong effort to study and grow in our knowledge of the faith. It's not enough to tell people "what" we believe, we must articulate "why" we believe as we do and do so with kindness, respect, and at times with a new language to be more effective in making the Gospel credible and persuasive in a new era. Front and center to the reason for our hope must be the kerygma or first proclamation. Namely, that by his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ reveals and communicates the Father's infinite mercy – he gave his life to save you – and he is with you always.

Connectedness

Discipleship and Communion are inseparable

Our communion with Christ necessarily draws us into a deepening communion with one another and with his Body, the Church. Christ died for all, and he suffers the loss of any. Formed and united with Christ, we too suffer with him that loss. So too, like St. Andrew we are overjoyed to share with others the Good News: come and see, "... We have found the Messiah!" (John 1:41) This desire for connectedness defines the very essence of our being:

- **As children of God, we are connected by our faith and by our continuous journey as missionary disciples to grow closer to our Lord, Jesus.**
- **As we join together in our parishes, we are connected by our love for the Church and her mission.**
- **As we reach out to our brothers and sisters of all faiths to help those in need and those who are the most vulnerable in our community, we are joined in solidarity in our mission to serve.**

We are formed as One Body, and strengthening these connections allows us to grow in new ways to accomplish the Lord's work throughout our vast and diverse diocese. That being true, we must find new ways to reach all people of diverse cultures and engage with them in the mission of the Church.

How can we assist one another to engage one another in community fully, even when that community stretches throughout a diocese of 11,000 square miles? Our methods of communicating needs to move beyond what we currently have and utilize a variety of media channels. We need to seek faster, engaging, and efficient ways to carry the Gospel to all corners of our diocese – to all members of the Body of Christ regardless of creed.



WOODY HUBBARD

Outreach

Christ teaches us how to evangelize – namely to live and put into action: love, mercy and joy.

Another need you expressed to me was a broader outreach to people in all cultures, creeds, and circumstances, as well as to our Christian brothers and sisters. This outreach, likewise, extends to those seekers who are not grounded in a faith tradition.

You spoke of a call to “set a better example of inclusivity,” and indeed, while adhering to truth, it must be a focus for our Church

to be understood as inclusive and welcoming in society today.

Likewise, the many cultures in the Diocese of St. Augustine are quite rich, and we need to respect this richness to understand fully the strength we have in our diversity.

In our immediate future, we must find more effective ways to share these gifts given for the common good to make Christ present and known to the world. This use of gifts for the good of all includes the less fortunate, the immigrant, the disenfranchised, the vulnerable, and the lost. It will take the efforts of all

the baptized in solidarity with all others to make this happen. Your outstanding support to the charities of the bishop is a resounding sign of your commitment.

My dedicated staff in all our institutions seeks to serve the faithful by providing support, serving as facilitators and connecting you to useful resources. We seek to assist parishes and schools by equipping the faithful with the necessary tools and the knowledge, but the ultimate source of strength and openness to become truly connected comes from you – the faithful members of Christ’s Church.

For nearly 150 years, the Diocese of St. Augustine has contributed to the proclamation of the Gospel in Florida. This is a heroic legacy, and we need to become more familiar with it. This fall, I will bring together all the rich talents available in the diocese to formulate a long-range plan that will integrate our various resources to move us forward in our vision to “become one” as Jesus dreamed for his disciples (Jn 17:21).

Our core path will be one of becoming missionary disciples, focused on this idea of “oneness” among us and across all faiths. We recognize Our Lady under the title of La Leche, as our mother and guide in becoming One Faith, One Family and going into mission with the gifts of the Holy Spirit which our

patron Saint Augustine prayed for so earnestly:

*Breathe in me O Holy Spirit
That my thoughts may all be holy*

*Act in my O Holy Spirit
That my work, too, may be holy.*

*Draw my heart O Holy Spirit,
That I love but what is holy.*

*Strengthen me O Holy Spirit
To defend all that is holy.*

*Guard me then O Holy Spirit,
That I always may be holy. Amen*

With the hope that this letter will encourage you and your family to be an instrument of peace so that we all may be one!

**PROMULGATED AUGUST 15, 2017
FEAST OF THE ASSUMPTION
OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY**